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Washington Whispers.

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It wasn't so much Barry Goldwater's blistering criticism that bothered the White House over the Senate vote against the CIA's mining of harbors in Nicaragua. What really hurt was that Nevada's Paul Laxalt, an old Reagan friend and head of the President's re-election committee, joined in the condemnation.

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Fresh signals of conciliation were beamed to Nicaragua from the White House even amid the storm over the mining issue. American officials say Washington will back off from supporting insurgents in Nicaragua if the Marxist regime will halt its aid to guerrillas in El Salvador.

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Administration leaders are picking up intelligence reports that Cuba's Fidel Castro is plotting an "October surprise" calculated to embarrass President Reagan before the November elections. One possibility: Foment a major escalation of guerrilla warfare in El Salvador and other nations in Central America.

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One unpublicized reason for the uproar on Capitol Hill over mining of Nicaraguan harbors: Fear that terrorists would retaliate by planting mines in several U.S. ports.